

The New Movies

By
ROBERT E. SHERWOOD.

THE old battle between commercialism and art goes merrily on. As usual, each bout ends with the victors firmly on the mat and the supporters of commercialism preparing a victorious snake dance through the streets. In all their various combats, which have been going on ever since the first introduction into an otherwise perfect world, art has invariably come out second best. It may have scored a few moral victories, to be sure, but that is small satisfaction, as any Yale man will be glad to tell you.

Commercialism is not only a formidable adversary in itself, but it has all the public's support. Its cheering section occupies the entire grandstand, while the adherents of art can be comfortably accommodated in the press box.

For instance, there has been a picture at the Rivoli during the last week entitled "The Impossible Mrs. Bellevue." Gloria Swanson is its star and Sam Wood its director.

The critics on the New York newspapers were almost unanimous in hailing "The Impossible Mrs. Bellevue" as a peculiarly pretentious bit of bunk. None of them could think up a good word to say for it. And yet the public went right ahead and bought nothing had happened and favored this film with its patronage to such an extent that it has been moved to the Rivoli for a second week on Broadway. What is more, it is sure to have a highly profitable career for itself all over the country, if one may believe those omens sent down by the gods of the box office.

In fact the criticisms of "The Impossible Mrs. Bellevue" have apparently carried as much weight with the film fans as the "Don't Get Hurt!" signs with the taxi drivers.

There is another case at hand which demonstrates the same facts in a different manner. Last winter Will Rogers appeared in a picture called "One Glorious Day." It was a strange, eerie affair, which bore absolutely no resemblance to any movie that had ever been seen before. The New York critics praised it enthusiastically, saying that it was amusing, sympathetic, and, above all, original. It was a distinct credit to the screen.

But the public at large either failed to read these criticisms or paid no attention to them, for "One Glorious Day" turned out to be one glorious flop. The box office reports were as chilly as the reviews were warm.

The proprietor of the Fairland Theater in White Castle, Ind., had this to say about it: "As punk as ever seen on my screen. Patrons left before they saw it. Crazy and nothing to it." The same sentiments were expressed by an exhibitor who showed it at the Palm Theater in Lindsey, Neb. Said he: "Funk. Lay off. Too much impossible stuff and altogether too silly to offer intelligent people."

The italics are ours, but the words themselves are direct quotations from the Box Office Record of the Exhibitor's Herald—a thoroughly reliable source, be it said.

These two instances that I have mentioned—"The Impossible Mrs. Bellevue" and "One Glorious Day"—are extreme cases, to be sure. There have been a great many photoplays upon which the critics and the fans have agreed, including "Tolable David," "The Three Musketeers" and "The Kid."

As a general rule, however, the opinion of the New York critics—and of the New York audiences, for that matter—is of small value outside the most boundaries of Manhattan. Pictures which fill the Capitol or the Strand are frequently rejected by the inhabitants of White Salmon, Wash.

The reason for this is fairly obvious.

New Yorkers look at pictures through the eyes of practiced theatergoers. They were paying money in at the box office long before the first Gaumont and Pathe comedies were ever shown at the Eden Musee on Twenty-third street. They understand the conventions of the theater—they have followed its progress carefully—and they have attained a degree of sophistication which is bound to influence their attitude toward motion pictures.

In the small towns the great majority of movie fans have never progressed beyond the "East Lynne" stage. Their knowledge of the drama goes no further than the days when Owen Davis and Lincoln J. Carter were in their prime. They have never been fed upon the works of Eugene O'Neill, or Shaw, or Galsworthy, or even Clare Kummer, and their point of view is limited.

Consequently such pictures as "Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight?" "Rags to Riches" and "More to Be Filled Than Scorned" hit them directly between the eyes. These conform to their idea of sterling drama, while "One Glorious Day," "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" and "Broken Blossoms" are too modern for them to understand.

The movie producers, therefore, are confronted with a large problem. They must make pictures which will be sophisticated enough to please the audiences in the big cities and unsophisticated enough to get over in the outlying districts. They must appeal both to the ultracivilized element in Times square and the contented home folks in Gopher Prairie.

Nineteen times out of twenty they manage to forget that the ultracivilized element exists; and in that way they save themselves from a most embarrassing dilemma and also make a great deal of money.

Sometimes, perhaps, it will be possible to make different grades of pictures for different grades of audiences, just as the theater has done.

But that time is not yet.

The coming week will yield three pictures which will be watched with

Some Faces to Be Seen in the New Pictures



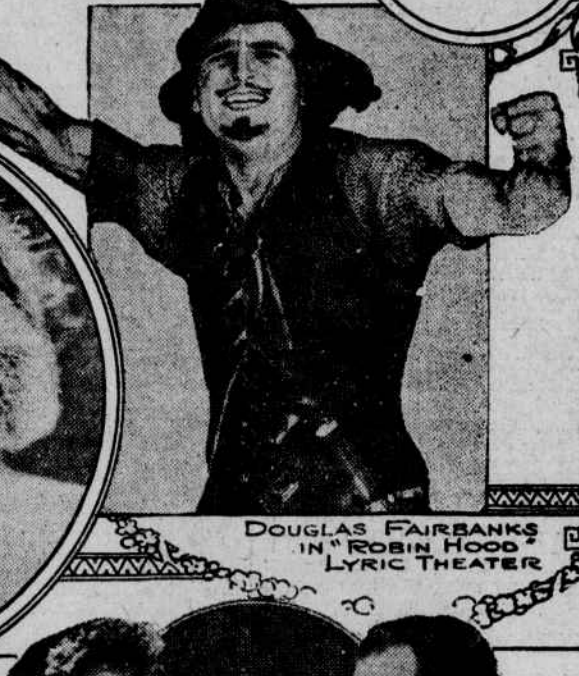
JACKIE COOGAN
IN
"THE TOWN THAT FORGOT GOD"
STRAND



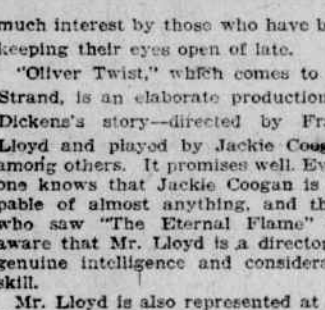
MISS HELENE CHADWICK
AND
RICHARD DIX
IN
"THE SIN FLOOD"
CAPITOL



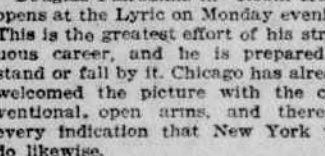
MISS JANE THOMAS
IN
"THE TOWN THAT FORGOT GOD"
ASTOR THEATER



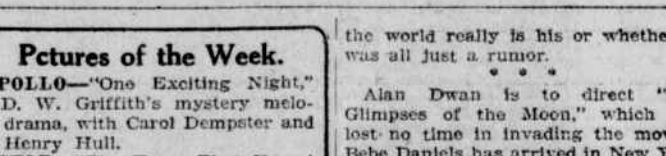
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS
IN
"THE SIN FLOOD"
CAPITOL



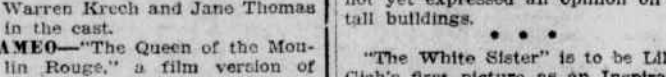
THOMAS MEIGHAN AND MISS LEATRICE JOY
IN
"THE MAN WHO SAW TOMORROW"
RIVOLI THEATER



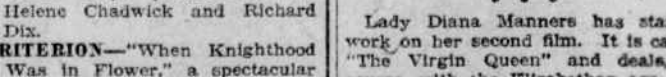
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS
IN
"THE SIN FLOOD"
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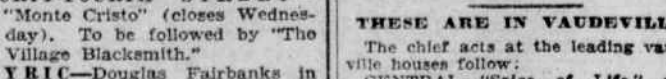
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"THE SIN FLOOD"
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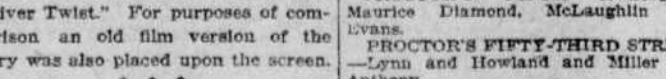
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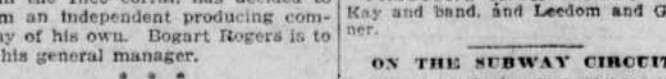
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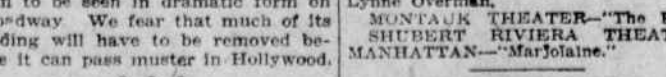
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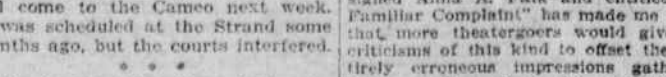
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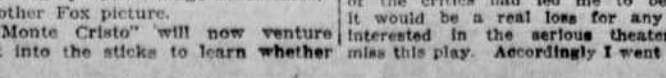
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CAPITOL

a friend to see it last Friday evening. I was keenly anticipating an interesting, even thrilling performance. It seemed to me that Hauptmann could not fail to be stirring, and that it was safe to count on Miss Barrymore, I had seen her in "Declassees," and had never forgotten her splendid portrayal of Lady Helen Hayden.

Like Mrs. Falk, I heard about one-half of Rose's speeches, one-third of Flamm's and lost most of Mrs. Flamm's. Mrs. Falk omitted mention of Bernd, but he also was unparadoxically indistinct, especially in his "big scene" toward the end of the play. If it had not been for Streckman I, too, should have thought that something was wrong with my hearing. (And I was in the fifth row of the orchestra.) But Streckman proved that it is possible for an actor to get every word across.

Evidently Mrs. Falk missed one line in the first act which I did hear, I. e., Flamm's remark that he had been tied for years to a wife in a wheel chair. Otherwise I, too, should have wondered whether Mrs. Flamm was Flamm's wife or his mother, for she was made up to look twice his age, and he called her "Mother" throughout the play. Why, oh why? For a man to call his wife "Mother" is not uncommon in some parts of the United States, but what possessed the translator to put it into this German play? And why did he make the character speak ungrammatical English? And why did Mrs. Flamm continually call Rose "lass," which (at least in my mind's eye) evoked pictures of "Bonnie Lassies" wandering among the heather?

Instead of all this hodgepodge if we might have had a translation in good, plain English, with at least some attempt to preserve the Continental "atmosphere" of the play, acted by a company who appeared to have studied elocution before coming forth as full fledged actors, with a star who could have given us the illusion of the peasant (Miss Barrymore throughout seemed to be Lady Helen Hayden pretending to be a peasant), then it would have been what the critics very untruthfully said it was—a memorable occasion in the American theater. FANNY L. FAY.
New York, Oct. 26, 1922.

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